
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Federal Motor Carrier Safety
Administration

[FMCSA Docket No. 99-6480 (Formerly
OMCS Docket No. 99-6480)] -- 4

Qualification of Drivers; Exemption
Applications; Vision

AGENCY: Federal Motor Carrier Safety
Administration (FMCSA), DOT.

ACTION: Notice of final disposition.

SUMMARY: The FMCSA announces its
decision to exempt 34 individuals from
the vision requirement in 49 CFR
391.41(b)(10).

DATES: April 14, 2000.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: For information about the vision exemptions in this notice, Ms. Sandra Zywockarte, Office of Bus and Truck Standards and Operations, (202) 366-2987; for information about legal issues related to this notice, Ms. Judith Rutledge, Office of the Chief Counsel, (202) 366-2519, FMCSA, Department of Transportation, 400 Seventh Street, SW., Washington, DC 20590. Office hours are from 7:45 a.m. to 4:15 p.m., e.t., Monday through Friday, except Federal holidays.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Electronic Access

Internet users may access all comments received by the U.S. DOT Dockets, Room PL-401, by using the universal resource locator (URL): <http://dms.dot.gov>. It is available 24 hours each day, 365 days each year. Please follow the instructions online for more information and help.

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Background

On January 1, 2000, the FMCSA was created to assume responsibilities relevant to motor carrier safety (See The Motor Carrier Safety Improvement Act of 1999, Public Law 106-159, 113 Stat. 1748 (December 9, 1999)). This explains the docket transfer.

Thirty-four individuals petitioned the FHWA for an exemption of the vision requirement in 49 CFR 391.41(b)(10), which applies to drivers of commercial motor vehicles (CMVs) in interstate commerce. The FMCSA is now responsible for processing the vision exemption applications of the 34 drivers. They are Rodney D. Blaschke, Thomas B. Blish, Ronnie Freamon Bowman, James C. Bryce, Thomas L. Corey, James D. Davis, Glenn Gee, Lloyd E. Hall, Byron Dale Hardie, Robert N. Heaton, Edward E. Hooker, James M. Irwin, Laurent G. Jacques, Alfred G. Jeffus, Oskia Johnson, Michael W. Jones, Don R. Kennedy, Dennis E. Krone, James F. Laverdure, Christopher P. Lefler, David R. Linzy, Richard Joseph Madler, Earl E. Martin, David P. McCabe, Richard John McKenzie, Jr., Kenneth R. Piechnik, Tommy L. Ray, Jr., William A. Reyes, Carl A. Sigg, Sammy

D. Steinsultz, Edward J. Sullivan, John C. Vantaggi, Winston Eugene White, and Turgut T. Yilmaz. Under 49 U.S.C. 31315 and 31136(e), the FMCSA may grant an exemption for a renewable 2-year period if it finds "such exemption would likely achieve a level of safety that is equivalent to, or greater than, the level that would be achieved absent such exemption." Accordingly, the FMCSA evaluated the petitions on their merits and made a preliminary determination that the waivers should be granted. On December 6, 1999, the agency published notice of its preliminary determination and requested comments from the public (64 FR 68195). The comment period closed on January 5, 2000. Two comments were received, and their contents were carefully considered by the FMCSA in reaching the final decision to grant the petitions.

Vision and Driving Experience of the Applicants

The vision requirement in 49 CFR 391.41(b)(10) provides:

A person is physically qualified to drive a commercial motor vehicle if that person has distant visual acuity of at least 20/40 (Snellen) in each eye without corrective lenses or visual acuity separately corrected to 20/40 (Snellen) or better with corrective lenses, distant binocular acuity of at least 20/40 (Snellen) in both eyes with or without corrective lenses, field of vision of at least 70° in the horizontal meridian in each eye, and the ability to recognize the colors of traffic signals and devices showing standard red, green, and amber.

Since 1992, the FHWA has undertaken studies to determine if this vision standard should be amended. The final report from our medical panel recommends changing the field of vision standard from 70° to 120°, while leaving the visual acuity standard unchanged. (See Frank C. Berson, M.D., Mark C. Kuperwaser, M.D., Lloyd Paul Aiello, M.D., and James W. Rosenberg, M.D., "Visual Requirements and Commercial Drivers," October 16, 1998, filed in the docket). The panel's conclusion supports the FMCSA's (and previously the FHWA's) view that the present standard is reasonable and necessary as a general standard to ensure highway safety. The FMCSA also recognizes that some drivers do not meet the vision standard, but have adapted their driving to accommodate their vision limitation and demonstrated their ability to drive safely.

The 34 applicants fall into this category. They are unable to meet the vision standard in one eye for various reasons, including amblyopia, retinal detachment, macular scar, and loss of an

eye due to trauma. In most cases, their eye conditions were not recently developed. Over half of the applicants were either born with their vision impairments or have had them since childhood. The other individuals who sustained their vision conditions as adults have had them for periods ranging from 5 to 43 years.

Although each applicant has one eye which does not meet the vision standard in 49 CFR 391.41(b)(10), each has at least 20/40 corrected vision in the other eye and, in a doctor's opinion, can perform all the tasks necessary to operate a CMV. The doctors' opinions are supported by the applicants' possession of a valid commercial driver's license (CDL). Before issuing a CDL, States subject drivers to knowledge and performance tests designed to evaluate their qualifications to operate the CMV. All these applicants satisfied the testing standards for their State of residence. By meeting State licensing requirements, the applicants demonstrated their ability to operate a commercial vehicle, with their limited vision, to the satisfaction of the State. The Federal interstate qualification standards, however, require more.

While possessing a valid CDL, these 34 drivers have been authorized to drive a CMV in intrastate commerce even though their vision disqualifies them from driving in interstate commerce. They have driven CMVs with their limited vision for careers ranging from 5 to 49 years. In the past 3 years, the 34 drivers had nine convictions for traffic violations among them. Two drivers were involved in accidents in their CMVs, but there were no injuries and neither of the CMV drivers received a citation. The drivers were convicted of seven moving traffic violations, six of them were for speeding and one was for "Traffic Control Device."

The qualifications, experience, and medical condition of each applicant were stated and discussed in detail in a December 6, 1999, notice (64 FR 68195). Since the docket comments did not focus on the specific merits or qualifications of any applicant, we have not repeated the individual profiles here. Our summary analysis of the applicants as a group, however, is supported by the information published at 64 FR 68195.

Basis for Exemption Determination

Under 49 U.S.C. 31315 and 31136(e), the FMCSA may grant an exemption from the vision standard in 49 CFR 391.41(b)(10) if the exemption is likely to achieve an equivalent or greater level of safety than would be achieved without the exemption. Without the

exemption, applicants will continue to be restricted to intrastate driving. With the exemption, applicants can drive in interstate commerce. Thus, our analysis focuses on whether an equal or greater level of safety is likely to be achieved by permitting these drivers to drive in interstate commerce as opposed to restricting them to driving in intrastate commerce.

To evaluate the effect of these exemptions on safety, the FMCSA considered not only the medical reports about the applicants' vision, but also their driving records and experience with the vision deficiency. Recent driving performance is especially important in evaluating future safety according to several research studies designed to correlate past and future driving performance. Results of these studies support the principle that the best predictor of future performance by a driver is his/her past record of accidents and traffic violations. Copies of the studies have been added to the docket.

We believe we can properly apply the principle to monocular drivers because data from the vision waiver program clearly demonstrate the driving performance of experienced monocular drivers in the program is better than that of all CMV drivers collectively. (See 61 FR 13338, 13345, March 26, 1996.) That experienced monocular drivers with good driving records in the waiver program demonstrated their ability to drive safely supports a conclusion that other monocular drivers, meeting the same qualifying conditions to those required by the waiver program, are also likely to have adapted to their vision deficiency and will continue to operate safely.

The first major research correlating past and future performance was done in England by Greenwood and Yule in 1920. Subsequent studies, building on that model, concluded that accident rates for the same individual exposed to certain risks for two different time periods vary only slightly. (See Bates and Neyman, University of California Publications in Statistics, April 1952.) Other studies demonstrated theories of predicting accident proneness from accident history coupled with other factors. These factors, such as age, sex, geographic location, mileage driven and conviction history, are used every day by insurance companies and motor vehicle bureaus to predict the probability of an individual experiencing future accidents. (See Weber, Donald C., "Accident Rate Potential: An Application of Multiple Regression Analysis of a Poisson Process," Journal of American Statistical

Association, June 1971). A 1964 California Driver Record Study prepared by the California Department of Motor Vehicles concluded that the best overall accident predictor for both concurrent and nonconcurrent events is the number of single convictions. This study used 3 consecutive years of data, comparing the experiences of drivers in the first 2 years with their experiences in the final year.

Applying principles from these studies to the past 3-year record of the 34 applicants, we note that cumulatively the applicants have had only two accidents and seven traffic violation in the last 3 years. Neither of the accidents resulted in bodily injury or issuance of a citation against the applicant. The applicants achieved this record of safety while driving with their vision impairment, demonstrating the likelihood that they have adapted their driving skills to accommodate their condition. As the applicants' ample driving histories with their vision deficiencies are good predictors of future performance, the FMCSA concludes their ability to drive safely can be projected into the future.

We believe applicants' intrastate driving experience provides an adequate basis for predicting their ability to drive safely in interstate commerce. Intrastate driving, like interstate operations, involves substantial driving on highways on the interstate system and on other roads built to interstate standards. Moreover, driving in congested urban areas exposes the driver to more pedestrian and vehicular traffic than exist on interstate highways. Faster reaction to traffic and traffic signals is generally required because distances are more compact than on highways. These conditions tax visual capacity and driver response just as intensely as interstate driving conditions. The veteran drivers in this proceeding have operated CMVs safely under those conditions for at least 5 years, most for much longer. Their experience and driving records lead us to believe that each applicant is capable of operating in interstate commerce as safely as he or she has been performing in intrastate commerce. Consequently, the FMCSA finds that exempting applicants from the vision standard in 49 CFR 391.41(b)(10) is likely to achieve a level of safety equal to that existing without the exemption. For this reason, the agency will grant the exemptions for the 2-year period allowed by 49 U.S.C. 31315 and 31316(e).

We recognize that the vision of an applicant may change and affect his/her ability to operate a commercial vehicle as safely as in the past. As a condition of the exemption, therefore, the FMCSA

will impose requirements on the 34 individuals consistent with the grandfathering provisions applied to drivers who participated in the agency's vision waiver program.

Those requirements are found at 49 CFR 391.64(b) and include the following: (1) That each individual be physically examined every year (a) by an ophthalmologist or optometrist who attests that the vision in the better eye continues to meet the standard in 49 CFR 391.41(b)(10), and (b) by a medical examiner who attests that the individual is otherwise physically qualified under 49 CFR 391.41; (2) that each individual provide a copy of the ophthalmologist's or optometrist's report to the medical examiner at the time of the annual medical examination; and (3) that each individual provide a copy of the annual medical certification to the employer for retention in its driver qualification file, or keep a copy in his/her driver qualification file if he/she is self-employed. The driver must also have a copy of the certification when driving so it may be presented to a duly authorized Federal, State, or local enforcement official.

Discussion of Comments

The FMCSA received two comments in this proceeding. Each comment was considered and is discussed below.

A letter was received from Mr. Oskia D. Johnson, one of the applicants under consideration. In his letter, Mr. Johnson asked that his application for a vision exemption be considered, citing his driving safety record.

In another comment, Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (AHAS) expresses continued opposition to the FMCSA's policy to grant exemptions from the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations (FMCSRs), including the driver qualification standards. Specifically, the AHAS: (1) Asks that the Office of Motor Carrier Research take no new action on exemption requests until an Administrator has been appointed and confirmed for the newly established Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration; (2) asks the agency to clarify the consistency of the exemption application information, (3) objects to the agency's reliance on conclusions drawn from the vision waiver program, (4) suggests that the criteria used by the FHWA (now the FMCSA) for considering exemptions is flawed, (5) raises procedural objections to this proceeding, (6) claims the agency has misinterpreted statutory language on the granting of exemptions (49 U.S.C. 31315 and 31316(e)), and finally, (7) suggests that a recent Supreme Court

decision affects the legal validity of vision exemptions.

On the first issue regarding the appointment and confirmation of an Administrator for the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, an Acting Deputy Administrator has been appointed and delegated functions required for the operation of the new agency. The other issues raised by the AHAS were addressed at length in 64 FR 51568 (September 23, 1999), 64 FR 66962 (November 30, 1999), 64 FR 69586 (December 13, 1999), and 65 FR 159 (January 3, 2000). We see no benefit in addressing these points again and refer interested parties to those earlier discussions for reasons why the points were rejected.

Notwithstanding the FMCSA's ongoing review of the vision standard, as evidenced by the medical panel's report dated October 16, 1998, and filed in this docket, the FMCSA must comply with *Rauenhorst v. United States Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration*, 95 F.3d 715 (8th Cir.1996), and grant individual exemptions under standards that are consistent with public safety. Meeting those standards, the 34 veteran drivers in this case have demonstrated to our satisfaction that they can continue to operate a CMV with their current vision safely in interstate commerce because they have demonstrated their ability in intrastate commerce. Accordingly, they qualify for an exemption under 49 U.S.C. 31315 and 31136(e).

Conclusion

After considering the comments to the docket and based upon its evaluation of the 34 waiver applications in accordance with *Rauenhorst v. United States Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration*, *supra*, the FMCSA exempts Rodney D. Blaschke, Thomas B. Blish, Ronnie Freamon Bowman, James C. Bryce, Thomas L. Corey, James D. Davis, Glenn Gee, Lloyd E. Hall, Byron Dale Hardie, Robert N. Heaton, Edward E. Hooker, James M. Irwin, Laurent G. Jacques, Alfred G. Jeffus, Oskia Johnson, Michael W. Jones, Don R. Kennedy, Dennis E. Krone, James F. Laverdure, Christopher P. Lefler, David R. Linzy, Richard Joseph Madler, Earl E. Martin, David P. McCabe, Richard John McKenzie, Jr., Kenneth R. Piechnik, Tommy L. Ray, Jr., William A. Reyes, Carl A. Sigg, Sammy D. Steinsultz, Edward J. Sullivan, John C. Vantaggi, Winston Eugene White, and Turgut T. Yilmaz from the vision requirement in 49 CFR 391.41(b)(10), subject to the following conditions: (1) That each individual be physically examined every year (a) by an

ophthalmologist or optometrist who attests that the vision in the better eye continues to meet the standard in 49 CFR 391.41(b)(10), and (b) by a medical examiner who attests that the individual is otherwise physically qualified under 49 CFR 391.41; (2) that each individual provide a copy of the ophthalmologist's or optometrist's report to the medical examiner at the time of the annual medical examination; and (3) that each individual provide a copy of the annual medical certification to the employer for retention in its driver qualification file, or keep a copy in his/her driver qualification file if he/she is self-employed. The driver must also have a copy of the certification when driving so it may be presented to a duly authorized Federal, State, or local enforcement official.

In accordance with 49 U.S.C. 31315 and 31136(e), each exemption will be valid for 2 years unless revoked earlier by the FMCSA. The exemption will be revoked if (1) the person fails to comply with the terms and conditions of the exemption; (2) the exemption has resulted in a lower level of safety than was maintained before it was granted; or (3) continuation of the exemption would not be consistent with the goals and objectives of 49 U.S.C. 31315 and 31136. If the exemption is still effective at the end of the 2-year period, the person may apply to the FMCSA for a renewal under procedures in effect at that time.

Authority: 49 U.S.C. 322, 31315 and 31136; 49 CFR 1.73.

Issued on: April 6, 2000.

Julie Anna Cirillo,
Acting Deputy Administrator, Federal Motor
Carrier Safety Administration .

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